

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-1904

October 17, 2014

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama:

The most effective way to protect Americans from Ebola is to stop the epidemic where it is occurring and to implement appropriate measures in this country as well. As we continue to support the efforts in countries in Africa where the disease is raging, we must take stronger actions to protect the health of Americans here at home. Given the spread of Ebola to a second health care worker in Dallas, it is evident that the Administration must put in place more effective policies and communicate those policies not only to health care professionals, but also to the American public. At this point, I believe the Administration should restrict travel to the United States from the countries most affected by Ebola to essential personnel like health care and aid workers and develop effective quarantine procedures so that anyone traveling from these countries can be monitored for 21 days to ensure that they are not infected with the disease.

The key to fighting Ebola is to identify those infected, isolate them, and trace anyone with whom they have been in contact. I am, therefore, deeply concerned that the Dallas cases have been so seriously mishandled. Even though the initial patient was symptomatic and informed hospital officials that he had recently traveled to Liberia, he was not immediately isolated but sent home with only a course of antibiotics. The second health care worker diagnosed with Ebola was actually advised by the CDC that it was acceptable for her to get on two commercial airline flights after she had cared for an Ebola patient. She never should have been allowed to travel. All of this raises concerns that the Administration has failed to prepare our nation's hospitals to make sure that any potential Ebola cases are promptly isolated and handled appropriately.

I would like to gain a better understanding of what your Administration is doing to protect Americans from the risks associated with Ebola and other infectious diseases. Specifically, I would appreciate clarification of the following issues:

1. What action is the Administration taking to improve U.S. hospital protocols and training with regard to Ebola?
2. It is not reasonable to expect that each of the 5,000 hospitals in America will have the resources and properly trained personnel to care for an infected patient. Is the Administration working with hospitals to designate state or regional centers where hospital personnel have the expertise, facilities, and equipment to quarantine and treat patients with Ebola and other infectious diseases?



3. Multiple federal departments and agencies – ranging from the Department of Defense, to the Department of State, to the Department of Transportation and multiple agencies at the Departments of Health and Human Services and Homeland Security – have been involved in the Ebola response. Whom have you designated to coordinate the response among the multiple agencies involved?

4. Points of entry into and out of the United States include multiple modes of transportation that are overseen by multiple federal agencies.

a) What is the federal government doing specifically to ensure effective screening at all points of entry into the United States?

b) Has the federal government provided proper Ebola screening tools and protection equipment to points of entry personnel?

i. If the federal government has not provided screening tools and protection equipment to points of entry personnel, what procedures are in place to distribute these materials rapidly?

c) Is the federal government coordinating with all sectors of the transportation industry to prevent further introduction of the Ebola virus into the United States?

i. If yes, please provide a description of the Administration's coordinated efforts to detect and prevent the spread of infectious diseases, including the Ebola virus.

ii. If no, why isn't the federal government coordinating these efforts?

d) What is the federal government doing to coordinate the Ebola screening processes at international transit points between the United States and West Africa with counterpart agencies in other nations?

e) In the event a traveler shows Ebola virus symptoms while in transit to the United States, what interagency response efforts are in place to ensure that travelers, transportation personnel, and response workers are protected?

I look forward to understanding what specific actions your Administration is taking to protect Americans from the risks associated with Ebola.

Sincerely,



Susan M. Collins
United States Senator